



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH & WELFARE

DIRK KEMPTHORNE – Governor
KARL B. KURTZ – Director

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
450 West State Street, 10th Floor
P.O. Box 83720
Boise, ID 83720-0036
PHONE 208-334-5625
FAX 208-334-0668

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Tom Shanahan
(208) 334-0668

Prepare for a Safe and Fun Holiday Weekend

Memorial Day Weekend is the traditional kick-off for summer fun and travel as people enjoy the great Idaho outdoors. This summer looks especially promising for outdoor enthusiasts, with plenty of water filling the Gem State's lakes and rivers. As residents prepare for coming months of fun, a few health tips can make your travel and adventures more enjoyable and rewarding.

Water safety--Idaho has not had this much water filling its rivers and lakes in almost a decade. High water flows and cold temperatures can be hazardous. Take extra care this year to:

- Supervise young children around water;
- Wear an appropriate personal flotation device (PFD) when boating or tubing. Children should wear a PFD on beaches, docks and riverbanks; and
- Be aware that cold water can cause hypothermia and death in as little as 10 minutes. Avoid boating or swimming when consuming alcohol – drinking alcohol can accelerate the effects of hypothermia.

Sun safety--Sunburns are more than painful, they can cause skin cancer. Remember to:

- Cover up! Cover as much skin as possible with tightly-woven clothing and a hat with a 2-3 inch brim or a shade cap;
- Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher. Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going outside. Don't forget sunscreen lip balm; and
- Wear sunglasses that block UV rays and protect your eyes.

(more)

Mosquito and tick prevention--The bites of mosquitoes and ticks can spread viruses and disease.

Protect yourself and your family:

- Apply insect repellent approved by the EPA to exposed skin and clothing, following instructions on the product label, especially when applying to children;
- Check for ticks on clothing, body, hair, and pets after returning from tick habitat;
- If a tick bites you, use a fine tweezers or notched tick extractor to remove it as close to the skin as possible and pull upwards with a steady, even pressure. Disinfect the bite site and wash your hands with soap and water. Do not squeeze, crush, or puncture the body of the tick

Food safety is always important, but the heat of summer presents special considerations. In order to avoid unpleasant episodes of ‘food poisoning’ remember to:

- Wash your hands regularly with a rich lather of soap, especially when working with raw meats such as hamburger or chicken. If you are camping and do not have access to running water, use hand wipes;
- Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot. Make sure that you have enough ice to maintain cold foods at or below 41°F. Put leftovers on ice as soon as possible. Any foods that have been ‘left out’ for four hours or more should not be eaten;
- Cook foods thoroughly to 165F degrees. Use a long stem meat thermometer to check the cooking temperatures of meats. Most meat thermometers come with specific temperature guidelines for the safe cooking. The color of the meat is not always a reliable indicator of whether or not the meat is fully cooked.
- Keep raw meats separate from other foods like salads or fruits; and
- Don’t drink out of streams or lakes unless water is filtered or treated first.

Most importantly, be prepared. Idaho’s diverse geography and sunny climate offers endless outdoor opportunities, but accidents or unexpected events can occur at any time. Carry a first-aid kit and enough food and water for an emergency. Always let friends or relatives know your travel plans. With a little bit of planning and by taking precautions, your outdoor experiences can be treasured for a lifetime.

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(Editors: For more information or interviews please contact Tom Shanahan, 334-0668, or your District Health Department Public Information Officer.)